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ABSTRACT

This report describes a 2-day meeting of experts to identify and discuss the ramifications of inclusive school system proposals on the management, administration, delivery, and effectiveness of education programs and services for children with disabilities and to initiate development of a national action plan to address the issues. The policy forum included state and local special and general education administrators, university researchers, policy analysts, and parents as well as staff from the Office of Special Education Programs and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education's Project FORUM. Preparation for the meeting and the process of the meeting are briefly summarized. The meeting resulted in the identification of four challenges seen as critical to the realization of reform to improve educational outcomes for all students. They are: (1) realignment of special education and regular education orientations and philosophies to embrace the diversity of student abilities, backgrounds, and needs; (2) funding structures that allow for the flexible utilization of resources to meet individual student needs; (3) examination of regulatory impediments to innovation without losing sight of the need to protect the educational rights of vulnerable individuals; and (4) implementation of effective instructional strategies and new approaches to preservice and inservice personnel preparation and deployment. Each of these challenges is discussed in terms of major obstacles and solution strategies. Attachments include a list of policy forum participants and a background paper by Eileen M. Ahearn titled "The Impact of Inclusive School Initiatives on the Education of Students with Disabilities," which contains 51 references. (DB)

ED 389 117

THE IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE SCHOOL SYSTEM INITIATIVES ON THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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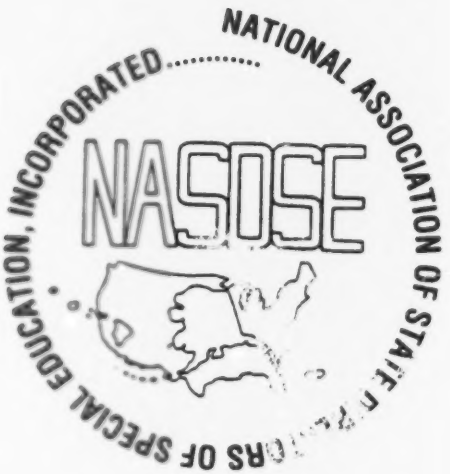
A Policy Forum to Explore Issues and Identify National Strategies to Support System Change



Convened by Project FORUM

for the U. S. Department of Education
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THE IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE SCHOOL SYSTEM INITIATIVES ON THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE POLICY FORUM

Current descriptions of American education reform frequently include rhetoric about improving learning outcomes for "all" students. Accompanying this trend is a growing interest in serving all students with disabilities in the regular classroom most often referred to as "full inclusion." Such proposals have stimulated much discussion among special education stakeholders about how students with disabilities will fit into the new inclusive schools. Concerns raised include:

- How to insure FAPE in a restructured "inclusive" system?
- How to identify and serve students with disabilities in a unified system?
- How Federal and State departments of education will monitor the implementation of IDEA and the effectiveness of special education programs and services?
- What information is needed to make the necessary policy decisions?

To assist the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs' efforts to promote discussion and explore the implications of inclusive school proposals further, Project FORUM convened a two-day meeting of experts from a variety of disciplines with a wide range of perspectives. The policy forum included State and local special and general education administrators, university researchers, policy analysts and parents (together with OSEP and FORUM staff). The purpose of the meeting was to identify and discuss the complex ramifications of inclusive school system proposals on the management, administration, delivery, and effectiveness of education programs and services for children with disabilities and to help initiate the development of a national action plan to address the issues.

Preparation for the Meeting

Project FORUM staff gathered information on the related issues and prepared a background paper summarizing developments leading up to the most recent proposals for inclusive school settings. (A copy of that paper is appended to this report.) Prior to the policy forum meeting, the background paper was provided to all meeting participants along with copies of three other publications related to the topic: 1) the October, 1991 issue of *State Board Connection* that contained the interim report of a special education study committee of the National Association of State Boards of Education calling for a "unitary system" in public education; 2) the article, "A Concern About Special Education and School Restructuring"

from the March 1992 issue of *Concerns*, a publication of the Council of Chief State School Officers blaming the current special education system for student failure; and, 3) a draft of a policy paper entitled "Issues Related to Restructuring Schools and Students With Disabilities" in which Maggie McLaughlin of the Policy Options Center of the University of Maryland proposed a framework for discussing the organization of schools using consistently defined terminology .

Project FORUM staff worked closely with OSEP personnel to identify individuals nationally respected for their knowledge about or participation in the inclusive school reform activities. In selecting policy forum members, substantial consideration was given to the specific background and experience of individuals to insure that a wide range of stakeholder perspectives were represented. The final list included State and local district personnel, researchers, policy analysts, a person with a disability and parents of students with disabilities.

The Process of the Meeting

The task of the policy forum was framed in terms of developing recommendations for short-term activities that could begin to address components of the problems identified by the group. The agenda (copy attached) began with welcoming remarks from the Director of OSEP and FORUM staff. Group introductions followed during which participants briefly described their experiences with education for children with disabilities as well as their interest in inclusive schools.

The initial discussion period was designed to elicit participants' perspectives on the challenges that special education is currently facing. The criticisms and recommendations addressed to special education from general education groups such as the National Association of State Boards of Education and the Chief State School Officers were reviewed and other related issues were examined. Participants followed a round robin process to list and discuss the problems and issues arising from the inclusive school proposals and initiatives.

Subsequently, small group techniques were used to prioritize problems and develop strategies to address them. Finally, the group as a whole reassessed the pooled information to develop consensus and make recommendations for a strategic work plan. FORUM staff worked throughout the process to organize the participant input and identify themes emerging from the discussions for use at the next stage of the process.

Outcome of the Meeting

The work of the policy forum resulted in the identification of four **challenges** as critical to the realization of reform to improve educational outcomes for all students. They are:

I. Realignment of special education and regular education orientations and philosophies to embrace the diversity of student abilities, backgrounds, and needs.

II. Funding structures that allow for the flexible utilization of resources to meet individual student needs;

III. Examination of regulatory impediments to innovation without losing sight of the need to protect the educational rights of vulnerable individuals; and,

IV. Implementation of effective instructional strategies and new approaches to pre- and in-service personnel preparation and deployment.

The remainder of this report expands on the implications of these challenges as discussed by the policy forum participants. The major **obstacles** participants identified as being in the way of meeting these challenges and some specific **strategies** that could be applied, in the short-term, to address them are listed for each challenge.

RESULTS OF THE POLICY FORUM

Challenge I: Reform to improve educational outcomes for all students requires a **realignment of special education and regular education orientations and philosophies to embrace the diversity of student abilities, backgrounds, and needs.**

Obstacles and Opportunities

Policy forum participants identified the plethora of terminology and the lack of consistency in its meaning and use as a major obstacle to enabling special and general educators to work together. General and special education do not always speak the same language when describing the same phenomena. For example, problems that flow from *tracking* in general education and *pull-out* programs in special education should be seen as two versions of addressing the same concern -- the accommodation of diversity in the classroom -- but the use of different labels for these practices tends to set them apart.

Participants identified the process generally followed to develop a student's individualized education program (IEP) as another obstacle. When used almost exclusively as a compliance mechanism, the IEP document serves to set students with disabilities apart from the general education population. This does not foster the use of the IEP as a means of addressing student outcomes or as an instrument for program accountability. However, there is widespread speculation that the IEP concept could be a useful tool as part of a comprehensive accountability system. Some innovators have suggested variations of continuous progress records for all student. Examples of the effective use of the IEP in special education program design and evaluation should be studied to provide some guidance in the development of systems for addressing the individual needs of all students within general education.

Policy forum participants reported that the needs of students with disabilities are not uniformly reflected in all the reform efforts currently underway in States. The inclusion of ALL students is frequently seen in the description of changes that are intended to make schools more accountable for student outcomes. However, often the desired outcomes are focused on content subjects with outcome indicators expressed as levels of academic achievement (e.g., demonstrated competency in algebraic operations) that might be inappropriate for some students with disabilities. The expected higher levels of student performance may also operate to move 'slow learners' and 'underachievers' out of the mainstream and into special education programs and/or remedial classes. It is generally agreed that there has been little recognition of the contribution special education's long history of using individual goals and objectives can make in the adoption of an outcomes-based approach in general education.

Policy forum participants noted that there is no existing mechanism for concerted action by parent groups. The practice of categorizing students by the programs they attend has contributed to the growth of isolated and potentially competing parent groups each representing a different constituency (e.g., PTO, special education parent advisory council, Chapter 1) or disability category. The cohesive application of any parental force for change is thus diffused.

Policy forum participants shared the widely expressed perception that significant portions of special education resources in local school systems are consumed in the preparation for and handling of complaints, due process hearings, and court cases to settle differences between parents and school personnel. Special education administrative practice has become characterized by the intrusion of lawyers and judges into the decision-making process that the IDEA reserved for parents and educators. It is not uncommon for the avoidance of litigation to be the motivation behind the resolution of a dispute over a placement or service for a student with disabilities, rather than professional conviction concerning the provision of appropriate services in the least restrictive environment.

Strategies to Meet the Challenges of Realignment

- Create joint task forces and work groups of regular and special education interest groups to influence the development of child centered policy and the adoption of practices that encourage the acceptance of full diversity throughout school systems.

- Encourage and study pilot experiments with new forms of individual educational planning such as 1) refocusing on the IEP process, 2) studying current ways IEPs are used, and 3) examining regular education initiatives in the adoption of individual learning plans.

- Encourage cooperation among parent groups by redirecting funding (through existing grant programs, private sources, or new combinations of resources) to support activities such as joint informational and training conferences, combined publications, and mutual support activities that promote equity in educational programs and services for all children.

Challenge II: Reform to improve educational outcomes for all students requires **funding structures that allow for the flexible utilization of resources to meet individual student needs.**

Obstacles and Opportunities

Participants noted that special education is frequently perceived of more as a physical place (e.g., resource room, special school) than a service (e.g., speech therapy, study skills training). Existing Federal and State finance structures for special education and other categorical programs require schools to determine that children meet eligibility criteria in order for them to receive the services provided through each separate funding stream. The need to demonstrate an audit trail for these funds has led to the development of service delivery systems with an array of pull-out programs that separate students into categories designated by their funding source rather than by the learning needs of students or the type of intervention provided. The labeling that results from these practices encourages the fragmentation of instructional programming for students and their exclusion from general education classes and other school activities. Educational funding policies are needed that intentionally operate to include children with disabilities in the mainstream of public school life.

The multiple problems posed by many children in schools today require attention from an array of specialists (e.g., social workers, psychologists, and health professionals) whose training and experience include techniques for treating problems that are complicated by

social, economic and medical factors and other family circumstances. The expertise to deliver some of the services these children and their families need resides outside the educational system in other human service agencies. Typically the specializations required are beyond the skills expected of personnel who work in school settings. A way must be found to integrate educational interventions provided by schools with the other assistance provided to children and their families in order to develop a comprehensive system of community based services.

Policy forum participants recognized that in the current environment of shrinking resources, there is the potential for an increase in the number and rate of children who are referred for special education services. Public schools have a mandate to serve children with disabilities, therefore, referral for special education is frequently seen as the only way to get some assistance to a student who is not thriving in general education. Such practices, while well intentioned, can lead to inappropriate labeling and stigmatization of children and dilute special education programs and services. A way must be found to provide adequate funds under general education for support services that are needed for students who do not require the "specially designed instruction" that is the basis for special education services.

Participants in the policy forum repeated the widely accepted observation that geography determines a student's educational destiny. They noted Jonathan Kozol's recent chronicle (*Savage Inequalities*) of the inequities that exist among communities that pose a continuing obstacle to the delivery of quality education for all children. Throughout the history of public education in the United States, educational financing systems have been redesigned in attempts to distribute resources in ways that compensate for social and political realities. Weighted special education funding formulas are but one example. Despite these efforts, inequality continues to be a hallmark of American education. An integrated, national approach to equitable education funding must be devised to provide a solution to this problem -- a solution that is driven by student needs.

Strategies to Meet the Challenges of Funding

- Study alternative funding strategies that have been implemented in limited areas or are being proposed that 1) allocate resources based on student need, 2) blend funding streams together, or 3) give schools the flexibility to target funds to areas of greatest need.

- Disseminate information on effective funding strategies of school-linked services that are either provided at a school, or are coordinated by personnel who are located at or near the school.

Challenge III: Reform to improve educational outcomes for all students requires an **examination of regulatory impediments to innovation without losing sight of the need to protect the educational rights of vulnerable individuals.**

Obstacles and Opportunities

Policy forum participants identified the common *mis*perception that integrated models of instruction across categorical lines are impossible under existing regulatory frameworks as a significant obstacle to innovation. Special education regulations were also identified as barriers to administrative innovations such as site-based management and the delivery of special services within the regular classroom. A way must be found to assure that FAPE is provided to every student with disabilities while, at the same time, promoting flexible school organizations that will maximize the student's progress.

Because access to services for students with disabilities is governed by student eligibility, there substantial resources devoted to the assessment process. Participants reported that frequently the information generated in the course of determining eligibility does not facilitate the identification of individual needs or appropriate services to address those needs. The extra time practitioners need to identify students' instructional needs and design appropriate services often leads to lengthy delays in remediation. Regulations in many States prescribe strict parameters for the assessment process that have fostered the overuse of formal test instruments thereby limiting the identification of student needs and the planning of instructional approaches for them.

Currently, 95% of Federal funds[1] earmarked for special education must be used for the identification of eligible students and to provide special education, related services, and other direct and support services such as personnel training and technological supports. Regulatory revisions are needed that grant States and local education agencies the flexibility to use Federal special education funds for assessment of individual needs and preventive, regular classroom based interventions through techniques such as pre-referrals and building-based support teams.

Participants noted that concentration on implementation of procedures designed to document compliance with special education regulations has monopolized the attention of professionals precluding any concentration on issues of program quality and student outcomes.

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[1] Five percent of a State's grant under IDEA Part B can be used for administration. At least 80% must be distributed to local education agencies to provided FAPE to identified infants, toddlers, children, and youth. The remainder can be used at the discretion of the State to provide direct and support services infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

Regulatory reform to allow flexibility that could lessen the monitoring burden while increasing the investment in improving student outcomes has been suggested at all levels.

Members of the policy forum expressed concern that lack of coordination among agencies that administer federal programs and interpret regulations for them causes expensive duplication of effort and fragmentation of services to children. It is difficult for parents to negotiate the multiplicity of regulations and administrative procedures associated with their children's education rights as well as obtaining services from other agencies. Close ongoing cooperative working relationships among governmental agencies at all levels could accomplish the elimination of such confusion and conflict and bring about clearer and more effective regulation of service delivery.

Strategies to Meet the Regulatory Challenge

- Document and describe the effects on students with disabilities of changes in school administration and management brought by the reform movement.

- Encourage the development of State regulations that empower special education personnel to concentrate on prevention and early remediation of problems, and that function to include students with disabilities in all aspects of school life.

- Review compliance monitoring practices at the Federal and State level that oversee the provision of programs and services to students with disabilities to make changes that will lessen the burden of documentation of process and allow redirection of resources toward improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

- Establish working partnerships among public agencies responsible for regulating programs and services that provide services in which students with disabilities participate.

Challenge IV: Reform to improve educational outcomes for all students requires **implementation of effective instructional approaches and new approaches to pre- and in-service personnel preparation and deployment**.

Obstacles and Opportunities

Policy forum participants cited the existence of conflicting information on validated practices as an indicator of the poor level of knowledge available on ho to best meet the

instructional needs of all children. In many cases, researchers carry out investigations of short duration with small groups of students and draw conclusions that cannot be widely generalized. In addition, the information needs of direct service providers have traditionally had only a small role in the design of research on instruction. All of these contribute to the lack of connection between research and practice. There is a growing need to forge a stronger link between the research and practice communities.

Participants noted that students with disabilities have been overlooked, for the most part, in the national education effort to develop new and more demanding academic standards for student performance in school. There is a need to develop a set of educational performance standards that will accommodate the entire range of abilities and talents displayed by our school age citizens with the goal of maximizing the potential of all students.

Policy forum participants stated that currently instructional personnel are not prepared to work in the kinds of environments that educational reform is creating in schools. For example, many teacher preparation programs are geared towards traditional categorical programs leading to specific, but limited, types of certification. The individuals who graduate from such programs are not qualified and don't feel competent to work with students outside of their specialty. Future teachers of children with disabilities often receive separate instruction from future teachers of third grade, algebra, physical education and typing. Inclusive school reforms require a more generic and collaborative approach to teacher preparation and a change to non-aligned certification requirements.

Participants declared that the funds and expertise for needed re-training of existing instructional personnel is sorely lacking at all levels. Budget cuts remove such resources from local and State allocations for education, and existing grant sources are inadequate to meet this need. Cost-effective methods for providing staff development must be used in order to upgrade the knowledge and skills of the current staff at all levels and across all disciplines within our school systems.

Strategies for Meeting the Challenges of Effective Instruction

- Structure the design of research projects on teaching and learning to encourage researchers to draw practitioners into the proposal writing process so that the research results and products will be used to improve outcomes for children and youth with disabilities.

- Involve teachers in the design and conduct of long term investigations that study the effectiveness of instructional techniques and classroom practices.

- Encourage reforms in teacher preparation and personnel certification that promote collaboration between regular and special education professionals and train teachers to educate children and youth with diverse abilities, backgrounds, and needs.

- Support and encourage staff development programs that expand the knowledge and skills of all school staff to better serve the individual needs of the entire student body.

ATTACHMENTS

POLICY FORUM PARTICIPANTS

NAME	AFFILIATION/PERSPECTIVE
Mary Beth Fafard	State Special Education Director (MA)
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Margaret McLaughlin	Researcher/Policy Analyst (MD)
Mary Moore	Policy Analyst/Researcher (DC)
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THE IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE SCHOOL INITIATIVES ON THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

by Eileen M. Ahearn, Ph.D.

A Background Paper Prepared for the Meeting of
The Project FORUM Steering Committee on Inclusive Schools

Context for this Paper

The Steering Committee on Inclusive Schools composed of State and local special education administrators, university researchers, policy analysts, general educators and parents, has been convened by Project FORUM to help identify the issues related to a variety of initiatives that propose varying degrees of inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education settings, and to analyze their impact on the management and delivery of services for children and youth with disabilities. After discussing and prioritizing the issues, the Committee will develop a workplan to address the issues and provide OSEP with a clear, prioritized statement of information needs to insure effective and appropriate inclusion of students with disabilities in all aspects of reformed and restructured schooling.

The major challenge that needs to be addressed in reference to all the proposals for the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education is: **How can the legislatively guaranteed 'free appropriate public education' (FAPE) be insured in a school system restructured to become 'unified'?** Within this major context, some of the provocative questions that must be answered include:

- What are the "real" problems in special education today?
- What is needed to work towards solving those problems?
- Are there identifiable actions already being taken to ameliorate those problems? and, perhaps most significantly,
- Why is it that unification between general and special education is so often seen as the best solution?

This paper is a brief review of pertinent issues and recent developments in the field compiled for the purpose of providing a common knowledge base for the Steering Committee and also to help frame the discussion to be held on May 7 and 8, 1992. First,

major trends in the evolution of special education service delivery are summarized. Then, criticisms of program design, practices, and procedures related to the 'locations' in which IEPs are implemented are outlined, followed by an overview of the proposals that have been offered in response. Finally, remaining issues and their implications for the field are examined.

To keep this summary short and enhance its readability, specific references are omitted from the text. A list of references that have been collected by Project FORUM at NASDSE in preparation for this activity is appended. Any of the journal articles can be copied for the Steering Committee, and all of the resource materials will be available at the meeting. Participants are also encouraged to share any additional relevant materials that would provide insights on the topic.

Trends in the Implementation of Special Education

The structure and practice of public education in every country are intimately entwined with the values of the majority culture, and they vary in concert with changes in prevailing attitudes. For example, the types of placements available and the process for assigning students to these placements are related to the extent to which the community values mainstreaming for students with disabilities. The history of American education, particularly special education since the 1950s, clearly illustrates this relationship.

In response to the belief in universal public education and the need to accommodate students whose ability or behavior varied significantly from the norm, the ungraded special class became well entrenched as a component of American school systems by the middle of this century. During the 1960s, increasing attention was directed to the fact that many children with severe disabilities and others who did not "fit in" were excluded from the rigidly organized general education programs of public school systems. In addition, the special class was widely criticized as segregated and ineffective by many within the field of special education. As a component of the civil rights movement, access to and provision of appropriate education for the handicapped became a major focus for court cases and advocacy activities.

This campaign to eliminate the discriminatory practices of excluding children with disabilities from public schools culminated in 1975 with the passage of P.L. 94-142, the Education of the Handicapped Act. Now known as Individuals With Disabilities Education

Act or IDEA, this federal statute guaranteed all students with disabilities access to a "free, appropriate public education." This revolutionary law also openly expressed the value of "mainstreaming," codified in the law as a requirement that children with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment and removed from the regular class only if such action is necessary to meet their educational needs.

Despite the guarantees contained in the law, the 1980s saw an increasing crescendo of criticism directed toward the results of its implementation. By 1990, special education was being cited by many in and out of the field for overly extensive procedural and documentation requirements, escalating costs, a lack of standardized eligibility guidelines, categorical labeling of students and an increasing isolation of special education programs, students and personnel. Although the original intention was to insure that services to students with disabilities were integrated into the regular classroom as much as possible, a medical prototype based on 'diagnosis' and 'treatment' in units of therapy led to the creation of the "pull-out" model as the prevalent service delivery approach, providing instruction and related services for varying blocks of time in a separate resource room, separate class or separate school.

In addition to access issues, questions of equity have been raised in relation to special education practices. The accusation is being made with increasing frequency that entitlement based on a mandated identification process for individual students with disabilities has resulted in a new type of discrimination and, therefore, inequity. Although the constitutional requirement of "equal" does not translate to 'same,' some argue that the segregation of students with disabilities from the mainstream of general education as sanctioned by Federal and State special education laws results in inherently unequal treatment.

Thus, despite the truly significant advances brought by 94-142 and State laws during the past fifteen years of implementation, the field of special education finds itself under intensifying attack from a wide variety of educational constituencies as well as the general public.

Criticisms of Special Education

A debate about how to reverse the growing separation of programs and services for students with disabilities from the mainstream of regular education while maintaining equity and access has been raging in the educational literature for the past ten years. The focus

has evolved from the pro and con discussions about the "regular education initiative" (REI) to recent proposals for a 'unitary' school system.

The REI was proposed as a strategy to counteract the fragmentation of programming for students with disabilities that had surfaced by the mid 1980s. A document by Madeleine Will, Assistant Secretary in the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services of the U. S. Department of Education, entitled *Educating Students With Learning Problems - A Shared Responsibility* issued in November, 1986 suggested that many of the techniques developed in special education could be applied in regular education, and that many more children with learning problems could be served within the regular classroom. Although similar ideas had been explored by others in the field in prior years, this document had a major impact mainly due to its wide dissemination and promotion to diverse audiences by the Office of special Education Programs of the U. S. Department of Education. A polarization of professionals and parent groups ensued from its publication and the intense support that developed for the specific and implied changes it recommended.

Since the issuance of the Will document, suggestions for change related to the proposals it contained have proliferated in the literature as have responses from opponents to this approach. Supporters of the REI have criticized the pull-out program as a fragmented approach that concentrates on skill training with little transferability and fosters the acceptance of lowered expectations for students with disabilities. However, aside from portraying the deficiencies of the current structure and extolling the benefits to be gained from an integrated approach, the proponents offer little in the way of specific organizational or procedural revisions for a successful implementation of their suggestions.

Opponents to the re-integration of the two systems argue strongly that a separate identity for special education is needed to protect hard-won victories such as procedural safeguards and individual programming based on diagnosed needs. They cite the inability of the regular education system to accommodate diversity and the possibility of reverting to previous conditions under which students with disabilities were ignored or rejected in the regular class.

A different type of criticism is offered by Thomas Skrtic who establishes organizational and administrative roots for current problems. He describes the traditional structure of school systems as non-adaptable and incapable of responding to the needs of students, disabled or otherwise. It is Skrtic's opinion that, given the existing pattern of organization, schools will not really change in the face of criticism, but rather will respond

by adding on something new such as a program or a category providing an illusion of change.

The current reform and restructuring movement in general education has provoked a repeat of criticisms focused on the separation between special and regular education, the most recent of which is a report issued by the Special Education Study Group of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). In an article in *The State Board Connection*, "Special Education: New Questions in an Era of Reform" which was released in October, 1991 as the study group's interim report, Virginia Roach presents the perception of the Study Group that special education has evolved as a separate and parallel system marked by extreme discrepancies among states in the identification of students with disabilities, unnecessary labeling and segregating of students, and the creation of separate facilities, separate funding streams, and separate teacher training and certification. The study group asserts that all students will be better served "if schools move toward a more 'holistic' philosophy of education," and "if schools are restructured in general so as to become more developmentally appropriate and personally engaging institutions for students."

Despite the numerous differences among critics of special education including theorists, practitioners and others, there are a few points on which they consistently agree. First, it is often mentioned that there is little, if any, credible research to inform this discussion or to provide data for policy makers to use in contemplating ways to improve the management and delivery of programs and services for students with disabilities. It is also generally agreed that the number of students in general or special education who will encounter failure in school is growing and will continue to grow in the foreseeable future as a result of factors to which the schools are unprepared to respond such as the transformation of the family, the crisis in health care, and the pressures for a differently prepared workforce for the next century. And, although there are widely diverse recommendations for action, there is unanimity in expressions of the need to obtain better learning outcomes for all students.

Proposals for Changes in Special Education

The various proposals to correct the isolation of special education range from an array of scenarios for re-integration into general education settings to suggestions for completely abolishing special education and restructuring the entire American educational system. At the same time, some in the field cite the substantial documentation of

inadequacies in general education as support for maintaining the separate identity and delivery of special education programs and services.

Proposals for a closer relationship between regular and special education fall along a continuum from no change, to full integration of the two systems. Proponents of more integration differ in terms of the amount of inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes and the specific types of students to benefit. Some call for only the 'mildly handicapped' to be included with continued placement in separate settings for those with moderate, severe and profound disabilities. Other proposals would place all but the most severely disabled in regular classrooms, while a few have recommended a full merger between regular and special education.

Opponents of REI insist that the regular classroom has never been able to meet the needs of students with disabilities and that there is no evidence that this reality is changing. In fact, they observe that the current pressures on general education to demonstrate higher achievement will make that setting even less responsive to students who cannot achieve the existing standards of excellence within the commonly expected time frames. Also, they envision the return of students with disabilities to the mainstream as a potential threat to individually designed special instruction and the protections and entitlements contained in federal law

As noted above, very few of the proposals for change include program specifics. One approach, the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM) has been offered by Margaret Wang as a comprehensive education system based on the coordination of general and special education at the building/classroom level. A variety of advantages have been claimed by the proponents of ALEM who point to its regular/special education partnership characteristics and family involvement as an answer to the deficits of current special education programming. Despite support from a core of supporters, ALEM's claims have been criticized as unsubstantiated by research. In addition, its acceptance of the existing classroom pattern of organization does not address significant components of the current problem.

In contrast to proposals that concentrate on making changes at the classroom level, Skrtic's proposal focuses on the need for change in the organizational structure of school systems. His approach starts with an analysis of schools as bureaucracies. He theorizes that schools are nonadaptable because they are managed as if they were machine bureaucracies (simple work performed by dependent, interconnected workers), although they appear to be

structured as if they were professional bureaucracies (complex work carried out independently by loosely coupled workers). Despite differences of degree, neither can deal with uniqueness because they are constrained by approaches to their work. Skrtic offers the "adhocracy" as a replacement for the bureaucracy claiming that it will allow the school to accommodate diversity and meet the individuals need of each student. An adhocracy is a configuration based on innovation rather than standardization, and Skrtic offers the example of the National Aeronautics and Space Agency as it planned and carried out its mission to the moon as the best illustration of this type of organization. At the time, there were no standard approaches for space travel, and they had to rely on the workers to invent the programs on an "ad hoc" basis. In an adhocracy, work is carried out in team formations using divergent thinking to develop new and creative solutions to presenting problems rather than convergent techniques that devise solutions based on available approaches. In schools configured as adhocracies, student diversity would not be a liability, but rather the expected stimulus for the basic problem solving approach to providing learning experiences for each student. Skrtic asserts that any solution that is based on the existing bureaucratic structure cannot result in any improvements because the options available to students who are different consist only of existing models of instruction.

A growing criticism of the dialogue on inclusion is its concentration within the university research community and the absence of input from practitioners and other interested constituents. With the exception of one article in *Exceptional Children* by Maryann Byrnes, a special education administrator in a school system who raised questions and concerns about REI and advised keeping all options open, there has been little commentary from the field.

It would appear from a review of the literature and current procedures in special education that we have yet to begin to generate feasible responses to the growing criticism of existing policies and practices in the field.

Remaining Issues

The pressure for improvement in education is extraordinary and intense. It is impossible to imagine that current drives to change education in general will have no impact on programs and services for students with disabilities. One need only look at material being produced by many States and school systems to realize that all parts of the

educational system must be modified to meet new expectations. The vision statement of the state of New Mexico is a good example. It denounces what it describes as the "typical-atypical" paradigm prevalent in schools that promotes the labeling of children as dysfunctional and encourages teachers to identify them and find someone else to educate them. Instead, the New Mexico vision is based on "full inclusion of all children in supported, heterogeneous, age-appropriate, dynamic, natural, child-focused classroom, school and community environments."

Funding mechanisms are another source of serious concern for advocates interested in protecting the rights of students with disabilities. Currently, funding is allocated on the basis of numbers of identified eligible students both at the federal level and in most States. Some suggestions for change involve block grants or allocating funds to districts based on an estimated average incidence of disabilities, giving the local school the responsibility for meeting needs without individual student labeling. Such practices raise questions of how to realize the protections afforded by IDEA in such a changed funding approach, and how to continue to assure that students with disabilities will receive the services to which they are entitled.

A topic that needs close scrutiny but one that is being almost totally ignored is the role of technology in enabling schools to accommodate individual needs now and in the future. One need only look at the contrast between the treatment of students with disabilities in the early part of this century and the procedures mandated by P.L. 94-142 to realize the magnitude of change that has happened. With the ever-increasing rate of change in our society, education cannot remain static especially in the application of technological devices. Although advances in technology have dramatically changed the operations of most other phases of life, they have had little effect on schools. It has been said that Thomas Edison and the Wright Brothers would not recognize their inventions if they returned to the world today, but John Dewey would feel right at home in today's schools! The potential for change from the application of technology has not been realized to any appreciable degree in our educational system.

Any consideration of the education of students with disabilities in the 1990s cannot overlook the role of State education departments and legislatures as well as the courts in defining practice and continuing to interpret the requirements of existing laws. For example:

- The New Mexico State Department of Education has recently issued an

administrative policy calling for the elimination of current practices and the education of all children in "school environments which fully include rather than exclude them."

- A new Vermont law, Act 230, requires that all schools develop a comprehensive system that will result in almost all students succeeding in the regular classroom with very few students labeled as handicapped.
- The case of Holland v. Honig supported the placement of a student with disabilities in the regular classroom over the objections of the school system, while another recent case, Granite School District v. Shannon, placed limits on a school's responsibility for a mainstream placement.

The question posed at the beginning of this paper is the fundamental challenge to which special education must respond: **How can the legislatively guaranteed 'free appropriate public education' (FAPE) be insured in a school system restructured to become 'unified'?** Answering this question entails a review of the values and attitudes toward education and individual rights as well as an investigation into structural and programmatic options that could be available for implementation in schools. A long list of specific questions can be posed to provide a framework for a discussion of this issue:

- How does a unified school system differ from existing systems in terms of features, structure, governance and operations?
- How would roles differ in a unified system for principals, teachers, specialists, administrators, parents?
- How would students with disabilities be identified and served in a unified system?
- What about students who need placement in private schools?
- Who would monitor a school's programs and procedures?
- How would IDEA be implemented and who would write the State plan?
- What parts of the law and regulations would have to change?
- How would the federal Department of Education oversee states' provision of FAPE?
- What information is needed to answer these questions and make the necessary policy decisions, and how can that information be accessed, assembled and disseminated?

Conclusion

The critical importance of special education addressing these questions to find solutions to its unsolved problems cannot be exaggerated. As Lynn and Douglas Fuchs point out in their editorial in the Winter 1992 edition of the Journal of Special Education, special educators must "get its own house in order" before solutions begin to be imposed by others. The leadership they call for must start with a full examination of the problem from all vital perspectives to identify the basis of information needed to generate appropriate resolution. This is the challenge to the Steering Committee's deliberations.

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